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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958

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SUBJECT: AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS FROM SIERRA LEONE

11. SUMMARY: Sierra Leone hosted an African Caucus meeting for Bank Governors and Finance Ministers from around the continent, its largest conference since the conclusion of the war. The Independent Media Commission presented its annual report to President Koroma, who again pledged his support for press freedom. The Justice Sector Development Program, in partnership with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, trained dozens of media representatives on judicial reporting. The US Embassy supported the commissioning of a newly renovated military hospital and announced the reactivation of the Peace Corps. Finally, new Brazilian and German Ambassadors presented their letters of credentials as the press heralded President Koroma's visit to Brazil. END SUMMARY.

KOROMA ASSURES FOOD SECURITY SUCCESS

12. A four-man delegation from the African Union and New Partnership for African Development [NEPAD] on August 3 met with President Ernest Bai Koroma. The Minister of Agriculture, Dr Sam Sesay said the purpose of their visit was to assess and have first-hand information on agricultural development in the country. Dr Sesay said the Sierra Leonean government, together with experts, has put together comprehensive data on agriculture and its related fields in order to achieve the six percent annual growth rate to alleviate poverty. He added that government has made agriculture its number one priority and increased its budgetary allocation.

13. The head of delegation, Prof. R M Mkandawire, said he is proud to note that the nation is on the "march towards recovery and no doubt has made a significant impact in the agricultural sector". Prof Mkandawire commended President Koroma for championing the difficult cause of alleviating poverty in Africa, as it demonstrates a good example for other African leaders.

IMC PRESENTS ANNUAL REPORT TO PRESIDENT KOROMA

14. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) presented its 2008 annual report to President Ernest Bai Koroma on August 7. Addressing the Commissioner and members of the IMC, President Koroma said that, "We believe in enhancing freedom of the press, and matters regarding the review of certain rules will be addressed.... your independence is guaranteed. You have your rules and regulations; you should make sure that they are followed."

15. The IMC Commissioner Bernadette Cole commended President Koroma for protecting the commission's independence, and also requested the government's consideration in terms of supporting community radio stations as international funding agencies have pulled out much of their support. The annual report itself detailed the activities undertaken by the commission in pursuit of its mandate.

SIERRA LEONE HOSTS AFRICAN CAUCUS MEETING

16. Sierra Leone was host to the African Caucus Meeting involving Bank Governors and Finance ministers from around the continent. Every year, the Chairman of the African Caucus hosts African Ministers of Finance and Governors of Central Banks to deliberate on issues of importance to their respective economies. The African

Caucus was the biggest conference hosted by the country since the end of the war. In his welcoming remarks, President Koroma said that he was gratified by the developments in the World Bank, especially the approval of the third chair for sub-Saharan Africa. However, he said that he is still concerned that the quota and voice reforms are taking too long to come into effect. In view of this, he urged the Bretton Woods institutions to speedily enter into force those reforms already adopted in 2006 and 2008. President Koroma also expressed concern in financing the wide infrastructure deficit facing African countries. This deficit is observed in all key sectors of African economies, such as transport, water, energy, and information and communication technology. The high transport and communication costs and the very expensive and unreliable energy supply have led to a loss of competitiveness in world markets.

JOURNALISTS TRAIN ON JUSTICE SECTOR ISSUES

¶7. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), in partnership with the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP), launched a weeklong regional media-training program on justice sector issues at the Eastern Polytechnic College in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone. The training was launched on Tuesday August 18, and will be replicated in Bo, Makeni and Freetown. A total of 219 participants were drawn from the print, broadcast and online media throughout Sierra Leone.

¶8. The training was aimed at improving the capacity of the media to report on justice and to sector issues in order to improve the coverage and public knowledge, as well as help overcome biases regarding the judicial system.

US EMBASSY DONATES TO THE MILITARY

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¶9. The United States Embassy unveiled and dedicated equipment and a refurbished laboratory to the 34th Military Hospital in Freetown. First Lady Sia Koroma called on the Embassy to train those who will be using the equipment and interpreting data to better help the doctors in doing their work. Ambassador June Carter Perry said that the US Embassy contributes to the fight against disease in Sierra Leone in many ways throughout the country through programs to provide prevention education, condoms, anti-retroviral therapy, and education on how to live a positive life with HIV.

US PLANS TO REACTIVE PEACE CORPS

¶10. A three-person delegation from the Peace Corps visited Sierra Leone in early August to hold consultative meetings on the organization's desire to reactivate the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. The delegation paid a courtesy calls to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, Health and Agriculture in order to explore possible areas for assistance. The team also stressed the need to sign an updated country agreement with the government in order to begin placing volunteers in country.

NEW AMBASSADORS PLEDGE SUPPORT

¶11. The new Ambassadors of Brazil, Mr. Jose Fiuza Neto, and Germany, Mr. Thomas Freudenhammer, presented their letters of credentials to President Koroma on August 13. While presenting their credentials both Ambassadors pledged their country's continued support to Sierra Leone. The President was grateful for the "numerous contributions that the Federal Republic of Germany has made towards the development of our country, particularly in areas such as Education, support of the Anti-Corruption Drive, Poverty Reduction and Employment promotion for youths."

¶12. President Koroma also expressed thanks to Ambassador Fiuza Neto for President Lula da Silva's invitation to visit Brazil. The President noted Brazil's development strides over the years and how "Sierra Leone stands to benefit from this remarkable success through the South-South cooperation initiatives that we are currently developing."

PRESIDENT KOROMA VISITS BRAZIL

13 In late August, President Koroma visited Brazil in what was the first trip ever made by a Sierra Leonean leader to Brazil. He emphasized the need to further strengthen the relationship because of the striking similarities Africa has with Brazil in terms of background, environment, and culture. According to the President, it makes more sense to tap from the Brazilian experience "instead of those that are far removed from us." While Sierra Leone has not had ambassadorial relationship with Brazil before, the two countries have had ties for 35 years. President Koroma's entourage included the Foreign Minister and Sierra Leone's Ambassador to the United States.

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